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OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Wednesday, December 22, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CHRISTMAS TRIMMINGS." Information from the Forest Service and the Bureau of Plant Industry. U.S.D.A.

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Listeners, what I have to tell you today is mostly about Christmas decorations for your home and your Christmas dinner table.

First, some special news for the Christmas conservationists--the people who are interested in saving our native evergreens that are in danger of dying out altogether from too much cutting. Probably you know what many organizations and even some State governments have taken up the cause of holly, our most prized Christmas green which is in so much danger of disappearing altogether. Women's clubs, especially garden clubs, nature groups, boy and girl scouts, and other associations throughout the country have joined the ranks of the conservationists. These patriotic citizens will not have holly wreaths this year unless they know that the holly was either grown especially for market or cut in such a way that the tree was not damaged. And they will buy only Christmas trees which they know were cut in such a way that they have not harmed our forests. Then, in parts of the country where such once-common plants as laurel, ground pine, bittersweet, black alderberry and winterberry are growing scarce, the conservationists are advocating not using these plants for Christmas decorations.

But the garden and the woodlot still can supply a great variety of Christmas trimmings that no one will object to. For example, Uncle Sam's foresters say you can cut lower twigs and small branches of such evergreens as pine, fir, spruce, hemlock and cedar, carefully so that the tree will not be harmed. Such branches, twisted together with a small inconspicuous wire, will make very handsome wreaths. Because balsam fir holds its color and lasts longer than most other evergreens in the dry hot atmosphere of the house, it is a favorite both for the Christmas tree and for wreaths, and other decorations. Hemlock with its drooping branches and compact growth makes lovely wreaths, too. But the place to hang these is outside your doors and windows because hemlock has a way of shedding its needles after a day or two indoors. A good indoor substitute for hemlock is native yew or "Ground hemlock" which has short, compact rich-green needles that last well. Whatever part of the country you live in, you'll find some native materials for wreaths in your garden or in the woods and hedges. Among these are English ivy, boxwood, Southern smilax, Oregon grape with its shinning deep green leaves, and the various club mosses.

And the ornaments to give color to these wreaths are as numberous as the greens. Depending on where you live, of course, you have a choice of pine or spruce cones--colored or gilded, if you like, sycamore balls, teazels, milkweed pods, sprigs of barberry with bright red berries, ruddy rose-haws, dried and wrinkle on the bush, grey bayberries from New England, or vivid orange-colored bunches of berries from the mountain ash tree. Even cranberries will give a pleasant dash of red to a green wreath. And gilded or painted nuts, including peanuts, make handsome decorations for either Christmas trees or wreaths.

One of my listeners writes me that she uses fruits or vegetables to add color to the wreath she uses on her dinner-table. And she says she has called into service grapes, tangerines, limes, kumquats, pears, apples and cranberries for Christmas decorations and has also used well-scrubbed bright carrots, warm red beets, silvery onions, purple-topped turnips, and dark green squash.

So much for the trimmings. Now about the tree itself.

A good many listeners have inquired about ways to keep a Christmas tree fresh during the holidays. Probably the best answer to that is: Buy a living Christmas tree, one that is growing in soil so that you can set it out in your yard when the weather gets mild. The next-best method of preventing your tree from shedding its needles early is to choose an evergreen like spruce or balsam fir that naturally holds its needles for a considerable time, and then set the tree in water when it comes into the house, and keep it in water as long as it is part of your Christmas decorations. You can stand it in a pail, prop it up by filling the pail with stones, and then pour in water. (Paint the pail red or green, if you like). A tree that stands in water should remain fresh and green for at least a week longer than a tree without water.

Another point. If you shave the cut stem of the tree with a sharp knife just before setting it up, the pores in the wood will be left open and take up more water. If the tree is small enough to move to a cool room each night, that will also help lengthen its life. In fact, the way to keep a Christmas tree fresh is to treat it as you would a rose or any other cut flower.

Which reminds me of what the plant men have told me about keeping a bouquet of cut flowers fresh in the house. Here's what to do about your Christmas gift of flowers. Choose a roomy vase and wash it with soap and hot water before you fill it with clear cold water for your flowers. This precaution helps prevent the decay of stems and leaves that are under water. Then take one blossom at a time, hold the stem under water, and clip off about a half-inch from the stem with a slanting cut. Then trim off the lower leaves, and spray the blossoms and upper leaves with water. Each night set the flowers in a cool place, and every morning trim the stems a very little and give them fresh cold water. If the flowers wilt, take the bouquet apart, and float the flowers in a tub of cold water for about an hour. Don't submerge the blooms, just float them on the surface. Then recut the stem-ends and place the blossoms in a freshly-cleaned, freshly-filled vase.

And you can often revive roses that have begun to wilt by clipping each stem and then dipping the clipped ends in boiling water for a few seconds and replacing them in a vase of clean cold water.

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